MARVEL UNIVERSE

NOVEMBER 1995

ISSUE 322

STILL $1.50

KAVANAUGH
CHEUNG
CARIELLO
McKENNA

THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN®

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

TERROR FROM BEHIND THE DOOR!

STAN LEE presents IRON MAN

THE DARKEST PAGE TO TURN

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IT'S BEEN TOO LONG SINCE ANTHONY STARK LAST WALKED THIS LONELY PATH, TOO LONG SINCE HE PAID HIS FILIAL RESPECTS.

FAR TOO LONG.

BUT HE'S HOPING IT'S NEVER TOO LATE.

I'M SO SORRY.

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NOT SURE WHY I AVOIDED COMING BACK UNTIL NOW-- NO EXCUSE, REALLY--

--EXCEPT, MAYBE, I WAS *AFRAID.*

I KNEW YOU WOULDN'T LIKE HEARING THAT, *DAD.* AND I KNEW THERE WAS NOTHING *MOTHER* COULD DO ABOUT IT ANY MORE.

SO I STAYED AWAY, STAYED *SAFE* IN MY OWN LITTLE SHELL. A PRIVATE WORLD WHERE YOU NEVER DIED, WHERE *NOBODY* EVER HAD TO DIE.

WHERE I COULD STILL HEAR YOUR LOVING WORDS, CLEAR AND STRONG, WHENEVER I LISTENED. *ECHOING* IN MY MEMORY, RESOUNDING THROUGH MY WHOLE HEART AND SOUL.

Brighter After The Dar'kness

HOWARD WALTER STARK

MARIA COLLINS STARK

19[illegible]
19[illegible]

Their Legacy Lives On

BUT NEW VOICES ARE CRACKING MY ARMOR NOW, DROWNING OUT YOURS.

SHOUTED ACCUSATIONS FROM FRIENDS, ABOUT FRIENDS. WORDS OF ANGER AND SUSPICION, CRIES OF GRIEF.

AND ONE WHISPER FROM WITHIN THAT I CAN'T SEEM TO ESCAPE ...

DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT I'M *DOING* HERE, WHAT I EXPECTED YOU TO--

COMFORT AND HOPE.

WHO...?

THAT IS ALL I CAN OFFER NOW.

MOTHER--?!

I AM NOT WHO YOU PRAYED FOR.

BUT I AM WHO YOU NEED.

YOU AGAIN...?

THE GIRL FROM MY *BLACK-OUT...?!**

THE ONE WHO TRIED TO WARN ME ABOUT...

...ABOUT...

SADLY NO, TONY STARK.

AND WHO YOU NEED NEVER FEAR.

*IRON MAN #320. --NEL

GOT TO BE SOME KIND OF DELUSION, A FANTASY...

I REFUSE TO ACCEPT IT.

REFUSE.

I AM FAR MORE *REAL* THAN YOU CHOOSE TO BELIEVE, TONY. ALL THAT IS **LEFT** OF YOUR REALITY, IN MANY WAYS.

IS IT TRULY SO MUCH *EASIER* FOR YOUR SANITY TO ACCEPT THE SHADOW OF IN-SANITY?

I HAVE DONE ALL THAT I CAN FOR YOU BY NOW, DEAR FRIEND, *RISKED* FAR TOO MUCH *ALREADY*.

I'VE *OPENED* YOUR MIND TO AS MUCH AS SAFELY POSSIBLE, *AWAKENED* YOUR AWARENESS.

IF ONLY WE ARE NOT TOO LATE...

WAIT--!

HELP ME, *PLEASE...!*

DON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN...

NO. NOT AGAIN...

NIGHT FALLS HARD AND FAST OVER THE DESERT SANDS OF THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST...

...BRIGHT AND BURNING SUN GIVING WAY TO BITTER WINDS AND A SMOTHERING SHROUD OF DARKNESS.

LOST AND FORGOTTEN ON THE EDGE OF THIS ARID WASTELAND, THE MESA VIENTO AIRSTRIP HAS LONG BEEN ABANDONED TO THE DEAD...

...AND THE DESPERATE.

CLINT BARTON, JIM RHODES, JOHN WALKER -- A.K.A. HAWKEYE, WAR MACHINE, AND U.S. AGENT --

--BROTHERS-IN-ARMS, ONCE AGAIN.

DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY, GUYS -- I MEAN, I *APPRECIATE* THE EFFORT AND ALL--

--BUT I REALLY HOPE THIS IS A *RENTAL.*

CONSIDER IT A ROOM WITH A *VIEW,* HAWK--IN EVERY DIRECTION, AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE--PERFECT FOR AVOIDING UNINVITED GUESTS...

...AND EQUIPPED WITH A SPACIOUS TWO-CAR GARAGE TO STASH THE HEX SHIP.

ONLY THE BEST FOR OUR FAVORITE *FUGITIVE.*

MAKE THAT "FUGITIVES" NOW.

MIGHT'VE EXPECTED THIS FROM YOU, AGENT--WE BOTH SHARE A SIMILAR PROBLEM WITH AUTHORITY--

-- BUT JIM RHODES, ONCE AND FORMER CORPORATE LACKEY TO THE STARS... ?

I'M *SHOCKED*, MY FRIEND. TRULY SHOCKED.

THINGS *CHANGE*, CLINT.

YOU KNOW THAT BETTER THAN ANY OF US.

STARK AND I WENT *OUR SEPARATE* WAYS A LONG TIME AGO.

I DIDN'T WEAR IRON MAN'S HAND-ME-DOWN ARMOR SINCE I HOOKED UP WITH THE WAR-WEAR, AND I CERTAINLY *DON'T* TAKE ORDERS FROM HIM ANY-MORE...

--LET'S TALK TURKEY.

AFTER ALL, *MURDER* IS A VERY SERIOUS CHARGE.

SO IF WE'RE *DONE* BEATING AROUND THE BUSH, HERE, BOYS--

SO DARK.

TIME TO FACE THE LIGHT AGAIN.

WHEN DID I PUT ON MY IRON MAN ARMOR?!

TOO DARK.

MY ARMOR...?

WHERE AM I...? HOW DID I GET HERE?!

AND WHAT *HAPPENED* HERE?! WHAT HIT THIS--

OH, GOD, NO.

I *RECOGNIZE* THIS PLACE, THIS BEDROOM...

BETHANNNYYYYYY--!?

JUST LIKE *LAST* TIME-- THE LAST BLACKOUT-- "WAKING UP" IN AVENGERS MANSION, *FINDING* HANK... *

NO. I'VE SPOKEN TO HANK SINCE THEN. HE'S *FINE*, DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT.

I FINALLY DECIDED THAT WAS NOTHING MORE THAN *SOME SICK PSILLUSION* PROJECTED BY MARIANNE RODGERS BEFORE MASQUE TOOK HER DOWN.

BUT THIS IS *VERY* DIFFERENT.

*IRON MAN #321.--NEL

ARMOR'S INTERNAL SENSORS CONFIRM MY WORST SUSPICIONS. THE DAMAGE HERE IS ALL TOO REAL...

...AND BETHANY CABE IS *MISSING.*

THOUSANDS OF MILES NORTH, A LONE BUNKER BRAVES THE HOWLING ARCTIC STORMS...

...OUTSIDE AND IN.

EVERYTHING HERE CARRIES TONY'S IMPRINT-- SO STRONG, SO SURE--

--AS IF HE BUILT EACH AND EVERY INCH OF THIS PLACE HIMSELF.

NO SHOCK THERE, RODGERS.

THIS IS STARK'S HIDDEN HOME AWAY FROM HOME, AFTER ALL...

...BUT I'M SURPRISED YOU CAN "READ" ANY THING WITH HIS LITTLE TOY GRAFTED TO THE BACK OF YOUR NECK.

THE CHIEF'S PSIONIC-BAFFLER IS ONLY MEANT TO INHIBIT MARIANNE'S TELEKINESIS UNTIL HE CAN DEAL WITH THE TWO OF YOU PERSONALLY, MASQUE...

...PASSIVE TELEPATHY IS NO THREAT TO ANY OF US.

THAT'S A MATTER OF OPINION, MACHINE-SMITH.

I'M SURE IT SOUNDS LIKE A CLICHÉ, BUT TONY'S *MIND* WAS WHAT FIRST ATTRACTED ME TO HIM ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.

YET THE MORE MY POWERS *DEVELOPED*, THE *MORE* I LEARNED ABOUT WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON IN THERE--THE *MORE* INTIMATELY *EXPOSED* I WAS TO HIS DARKEST SECRETS--

--UNTIL IT FINALLY *BROKE* ME.

YOU SAVED HIM FROM MY RAGE, MASQUE, MAYBE EVEN SAVED ME FROM MYSELF WITHOUT KNOWING IT--

--STOPPED ME FROM DOING SOMETHING I MIGHT'VE REGRETTED FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE--

--AND NOW HE'S *BETRAYED* US BOTH.

THAT'S *PARANOIA* SPEAKING, RODGERS.

WE'VE GOT *FREE REIN* OF THIS ENTIRE BUNKER, ACCESS TO ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING WE *COULD* NEED UNTIL HE GETS BACK...

...AND HE NEVER EVEN TRIED TO UNMASK ME.

YET.

BUT HE *DID* TAKE YOUR GUNS, AND HE DID LEAVE HIS *PET ROBOT* HERE TO "GUARD" US.

HOUSE ARREST, NO MATTER HOW YOU CUT IT!

AND THIS PARTICULAR LOCKED DOOR IS STILL *OFF-LIMITS* TO--

YEAH!

SHOULD HAVE GUESSED.

BETH MUST HAVE GOTTEN A LITTLE TOO CURIOUS ABOUT MY LAST-MINUTE VISIT TO *AVENGERS MANSION,** AND PLANNED TO FOLLOW ME HERE.

STARK ENTERPRISES
REQUISITION FORM 247 RF
DATE OF REQUEST 10 14 95
ITEM REQUESTED
SE JET
FLIGHT PLAN FILED:
LAGUARDIA AIRPORT,
NEW YORK CITY
PURPOSE OF REQUEST:
INVESTIGATION
AND PURSUIT
REQUESTED BY:
BETHANY CABE, CHIEF
OF OPERATIONS,
SECURITY
SIGNATURE:
Bethany Cabe

*IRON MAN #321. --NEL

JUST HAVE TO HOPE SHE LEFT CALIFORNIA *BEFORE* HER APARTMENT WAS HIT BY... BY...

BUT I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE ELSE TO START THE SEARCH.

WITH THE *SHORT-TERM* EXCEPTION OF HANK PYM AND MYSELF, THE MANSION'S BEEN *EMPTY* SINCE THE BLACK WIDOW ORDERED THE EVACUATION...*

...WHATEVER.

SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT I'LL FIND HER HERE NOW, THREE DAYS LATER.

*AVENGERS #391. --NEL

...BUT IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE IT.

DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT AT ALL, FOR THAT MATTER.

HASN'T FELT ANYTHING LIKE THE HOUSE AND HOME I'VE KNOWN ALL MY LIFE SINCE THAT CURSED PARTY--*

--SINCE THE DEATHS OF THREE OF OUR OWN, MURDERED FROM WITHIN--

*AVENGERS: THE CROSSING.

--APPARENTLY CONNECTED TO THIS DAMNABLE DOOR IN THE BASEMENT SOMEHOW.

WHAT THE H--?

IT'S OPENING--

--THE DOOR IS FINALLY OPENING!

WE TRIED EVERY-THING SHORT OF A NUCLEAR BARRAGE WITH-OUT MAKING A DENT...

...AND NOW IT'S CRACKING ON ITS OWN!?

WEAPONS SYSTEMS ARE UP AND ON-LINE ALREADY, BUT THERE'S NO TIME TO CONTACT THE OTHER AVENGERS.

SOMETHING'S COMING THROUGH...

...SOMETHING--

HO, MAN OF IRON!

STAND AND WAIT NO LONGER.

A WARRIOR'S WELCOME SHOULDST ALWAYS ATTEND THE ARRIVAL OF NEUT...

...MASTER OF ARMS!

KZATZ

YEAAR--!

CAUGHT ME OFF-GUARD WITH THAT BLAST...

...BUT MY ARMOR'S STABILIZERS ALREADY HAVE ME BACK IN POSITION FOR A TASTE OF--

VRR

...IRON MAN IN YOUR FACE!

NOT WHEN YOU LEAVE YOURSELF WIDE OPEN FOR AN EASY SHOT...

uhff

ZRAAK

NOT AT THAT SNAIL'S PACE, MY BOY.

KRSH

"...OUT OF THE BALLPARK."

I DO SO LOVE THE LOCAL IDIOMS OF YOUR ERA, STARK--

--SUCH COLORFUL TURNS OF PHRASE, NONE-THELESS!

SKRAKZZ

--EVEN IF THE SUBTLETIES OFT ESCAPE ME--

HOW THE...?!

SO FAST, SO SAVAGE...!

QUICK ENOUGH TO DODGE MY REPULSORS--

--AND STRONG ENOUGH TO TEAR THROUGH MY ARMOR LIKE TISSUE PAPER...

TOOM

...WHO IN GOD'S NAME IS THIS LUNATIC?!

HARDLY A MATCH FOR THE SPEED OF THOUGHT...

...AND THE SKILLS OF A MILLENNIUM MASTERED!

ZTTZ

ZTTZ

ZTTZ

ZTTZ

LIGHT-SPEED LASERS NOW, IRON STARK--?

IMPRESSIVE.

NEUT USED THIS STRANGE STAFF TO *DEFLECT* EVERYTHING I THREW AT HIM WITHOUT EVEN BREAKING A SWEAT.

LONG-DISTANCE ASSAULT PROVED TOTALLY IN-EFFECTIVE.

IF THAT IS THE BEST YOU HAVE TO OFFER, ARMORED ONE...

...I AM *WOEFULLY* DISAPPOINTED.

FOOM

KRAKOW

...TIME TO TAKE IT *UP CLOSE* AND PERSONAL.

UNBELIEVABLE!

ONE PUNCH--A *SINGLE* BLOW--

--AND THE LITTLE GNOME ACTUALLY *SHATTERED* MY HELMET!

ENERGY-LANCE *COULD* BE THE *SOURCE* OF HIS POWER, SOMEHOW--SOME KIND OF CHANNEL OR BATTERY FOR ENERGIES FROM ELSEWHERE--

KCHK

--SO IT'S GOT TO GO.

ARMOR'S INTERNAL CIRCUITS ARE *OVERLOADING* ALREADY, LOSING POWER BY THE SECOND.

NO CHOICE BUT TO REMOTE-CONTROL MY GAUNTLET TO SEND THE LANCE BACK WHERE IT CAME FROM--STRAIGHT THROUGH THAT HELLISH DOOR AGAIN--

--AND HOPE TO HOLY HEAVEN THAT ITS UGLY OWNER *FOLLOWS*.

EXCELLENT STRATEGY, MY BOY.

THE ONLY ONE WITH A CHANCE OF SUCCESS, REALLY.

"...FULLY TESTED AND TEMPERED FOR THE WORST YET TO COME."

THE PUPIL FINALLY THREATENS TO ECLIPSE HIS TEACHER...

LESS THAN AN HOUR LATER, ROUGHLY EIGHTY MILES EAST--

--THE SOUTHAMPTON ESTATE OF JANET VAN DYNE--

--CURRENT HEARTH AND HOME TO WHAT'S LEFT OF THE MIGHTY AVENGERS.

SPECIFICALLY, PIETRO MAXIMOFF--THE MUTANT SPEEDSTER CALLED QUICKSILVER --AND HIS WORRIED WIFE, THE INHUMAN ELEMENTAL NAMED CRYSTAL...

...AS WELL AS THE SYNTHEZOID MAN OF PLASTIC AND STEEL KNOWN AS THE VISION, ALONGSIDE THEIR TRUSTED COMPANION AND RETAINER, JARVIS.

I WANT 'RILLA--! I WANT 'RILLA!

EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM CONCERNED WITH A SINGLE UPSET CHILD...

...YOUNG LUNA MAXIMOFF.

WE KNOW, LUNA, WE ALL MISS HER. BUT MARILLA IS... SHE'S NOT...

IT'S LATE. YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN ASLEEP HOURS AGO, LITTLE ONE...

MIGHT BE TOO LATE FOR US ALL BY NOW...

IRON MAN--!?

TONY, WHAT'S HAPPENED...?! ARE YOU ALL--

I THINK I JUST MET THE MONSTER THAT KILLED GILGA-MESH.

NEUT!?

WHERE? HOW--?!

DADDA, DADDA!

AS OF NOW, AVENGERS MANSION IS OFFICIALLY CLOSED TO ABSOLUTELY EVERYONE.

TOTAL QUARANTINE.

NO ONE-- AND I MEAN, NO ONE--GOES IN OR OUT AGAIN WITH-OUT EXPLICIT PERMISSION FROM ME.

DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE, JAN.

STARK!?

YOU'VE GOT SOME SERIOUS NERVE SHOW-ING UP HERE--NOW-- AFTER ALL YOU'VE DONE!

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, JAN? WHAT'S HE--

MY "OLD FRIEND" HERE BANK-RUPTED ME, AVENGERS! CLEANED ME OUT COMPLETELY, ACCORDING TO MY LAWYER!*

BUT THIS HOUSE IS STILL MINE, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST.

AND I WANT YOU OUT OF IT NOW, MISTER.

WHY WOULD RHODES OR THE AGENT HELP HAWKEYE "ESCAPE" FROM THE FORCE WORKS COMPOUND* BEFORE WE'VE HAD A CHANCE TO PROVE HIS INNOCENCE...?

JUST SOUNDS LIKE MORE OF THEIR "BROTHERS-IN-ARMS" MACHISMO TO ME, NATASHA. BUT I'VE BEEN TIED UP WITH SOME PROBLEMS OF MY OWN FOR THE LAST FEW--

BLACK WIDOW... WASP...

...WE HAVE AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR, BEARING NEWS OF--

WAIT A MINUTE...

I SAID, "OUT"!

NOW!

*WAR MACHINE #20.--NEL

*AVENGERS #391.--NEL

IT'S NOT TRUE.

STARK ENTERPRISES WOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT--THEY *COULDN'T* HAVE--WITHOUT MY KNOWLEDGE.

AND YOU *CAN'T* BELIEVE I'D--

OF COURSE NOT, SIR. THERE'S *NO* DOUBT IN MY MIND, WHAT-SOEVER.

BUT...

BUT *THEY'RE* NOT SO SURE.

TOO STRANGE, TEAM.

IT'S NOT LIKE HIM AT ALL TO GIVE UP SO *EASILY*...

"...SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH TONY."

I'M NOT BUYING THIS, CLINT, NOT FOR A SECOND.

THERE'S NO WAY YOU'LL CONVINCE ANY OF US THAT HE SET YOU UP--FRAMED YOU FOR A MURDER YOU DIDN'T COMMIT--

--NO MATTER WHAT KIND OF EVIDENCE YOU THINK YOU'VE GATHERED.

I'VE KNOWN STARK TOO LONG. WE ALL HAVE.

BUT YOU AND I GO BACK EVEN FURTHER, 'TASHA--SHARE A MORE ...INTIMATE HISTORY--

--AND YOU KNOW I COULDN'T KILL ANYONE.

ALONE.

TONIGHT...

SO YOU DON'T REALLY HAVE ANY CHOICE, DO YOU?

YOU'VE GOT TO COME MEET ME--TALK TO ME--IN PERSON.

CONTINUES IN AVENGERS #392 AND FORCE WORKS #18...!
NEXT ISSUE: TONY STARK FACES THE UGLY TRUTH!